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Humanitarian Disaster or Act of God -- Dangerous Implication in Practice?

Responding systemically to the probable fate of millions

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[Introduction](#)
[Humanitarian disaster?](#)
[Disastrous analysis](#)
[Acts of God?](#)
[Systemic human neglect](#)
[Focus of neglect in systemic analysis](#)
[Real face of humanitarian disaster?](#)
[Responsibility of God?](#)
[Exacerbating disastrous system instability through enabling population increase](#)
[Who are the enablers of pain and suffering?](#)
[Role of the Abrahamic religions](#)
[Obedience to orders in enabling humanitarian disaster](#)
[Primary leadership role of the Christian papacy](#)
[Mapping controversial psychosocial dynamics: "putting God on the map"](#)
[Designing denial, unbelief and ignorance into systemic concept maps](#)
[Confidence and consensus: collective strategy in a time of delusion](#)
[References](#)

Introduction

The United Nations is currently warning of a major threat to hundreds of thousands, if not millions, in the [Horn of Africa](#) (*Drought-hit Somalia on brink of humanitarian disaster*, UN News Center, 2 March 2011; *Drought in Horn of Africa threatens millions*, FAO Media Centre, 14 June 2011; *Drought in east Africa prompts calls to address humanitarian emergency*, *The Guardian*, 2 July 2011; *Horn of Africa Humanitarian Crisis; The Ogaden Crisis: The Horn of Africa's invisible humanitarian disaster*, *Africa Faith and Justice Network*, 15 September 2010; *UN states humanitarian disaster in Somalia*, *The Voice of Russia*, 5 July 2011; Barry Mason, *Famine Threat In The Horn of Africa*, *Global Research*, 6 July 2011).

As on previous occasions, the rains have failed. People are without food and water. They are having to trek for days to refugees camps where some food may be distributed -- as stocks and international aid funding permit. Many are dying, especially the very young. Many are close to starvation. A major famine in 1991 in that region killed around a quarter of a million people and left two million displaced.

South of that region, the level of massacre associated with the [Great War of Africa](#) in the Congo region -- has been virtually ignored during the past decade. By 2008 that war and its aftermath had killed 5.4 million people, mostly from disease and starvation, making the Second Congo War the deadliest conflict worldwide since World War II. Despite those figures, the UN has recently described the situation in Darfur as the "**world's worst humanitarian disaster**" (*Humanitarian situation in Western Darfur spiralling downhill*, *News from Africa*, 10 March 2011).

The current case, in the Horn of Africa, as with those which have preceded it there, is a symptom of a familiar condition, It may be repeated more frequently and more widely according to some analyses of future food and water shortages (*World at risk of another food crisis: FAO*, *Reuters*, 14 March 2011; *Global Water Shortage Looms In New Century*, December 1999; *Water Shortages Rising Across the Globe*, 15 May 2009). The conventional response is to appeal widely for aid to ensure that food can be urgently collected and distributed to those in need (*Emergency funding to prevent a humanitarian disaster in the Horn of Africa*, Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation, 6 July 2011; Xan Rice, *Aid-plea for 10m in Drought-hit East Africa*, *The Guardian*, 5 July 2011).

Curiously, over the past decade, the world has also been witness to the investment of an estimated \$1.3 trillion in an international military intervention in Iraq/Afghanistan by a primarily Christian coalition -- supposedly for humanitarian reasons and in response to the death of

some 3,000 people on the occasion of 9/11. This has resulted in 100,000 to 600,000 [casualties in Iraq](#) and an even more problematic estimate for the [civilian casualties in Afghanistan](#) -- all primarily of Islamic faith. This multinational investment has significantly contributed to the austerity challenges now faced by many countries.

The question which merits consideration is how responsibility for repetition of this pattern of humanitarian disasters is to be understood, especially since variants of it occur in other regions and with respect to other types of disaster, most notably flooding and earthquakes, with every possibility of lethal [pandemics](#) (*The Next Pandemic*, *Newsweek*, May 2009).

Given the fundamental importance in practice of religious belief and obedience to divine injunctions, to what extent is disaster to be understood as an Act of God, or rather as a disastrous failure of human civilization -- thereby enabled and heralding its final collapse (cf [Jared Diamond](#), *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Survive*, 2005)

Humanitarian disaster?

How are such events to be appropriately understood as "[humanitarian disasters](#)"?

Does this imply:

- that people are forced to leave their homes, threatened by starvation and death, especially when exposed to the savage exploitation of others?
- that human beings are appealing for assistance in the face of this plight?
- that it has been administratively defined as a "humanitarian disaster" by international authorities, such as agencies of the United Nations?
- that it has been framed as a "humanitarian disaster" by the international media, for whom it is necessarily a heart wrenching story with personal interest?

Clearly it is all of these to some degree.

It is less evident how the "humanitarian disaster" might be understood as:

- a failure to learn from previous disasters, especially when they result from well-recognized weather patterns or other natural phenomena
- a planning failure on the part of national and international authorities, in the light of such past experience
- a deliberate, if not cynical, willingness to allow such disasters to emerge in the expectation that exceptional aid will then be forthcoming
- a worldview which accepts that such things happen, whether or not there is any attempt to respond to them

Disastrous analysis

Potentially more intriguing is the nature of the analysis of such disasters and the response to them. Why is there a degree of naive, cynical, passivity in the expectation of disasters and surprises -- associated with a complex pattern of denial, as variously argued (Karen A. Cerulo, *Never Saw It Coming: cultural challenges to envisioning the worst*, 2006; Nassim Nicholas Taleb, *The Black Swan: the impact of the highly improbable*, 2007).

The evident tragedy of the "humanitarian disaster" then conveniently obscures recognition of what might be better understood as humanity's disastrous capacity to manage its affairs in a challenging environment subject to life-threatening events for thousands -- if not millions. What implication does this have for those who claim responsibility and unique competence for the analysis of vulnerabilities to such disaster?

It is of course the case that data and research can identify the probability of the occurrence or recurrence of such disasters. Indicators are assiduously produced as a result of this engagement with global risk management. Unfortunately the focus is almost entirely on identifying the **probability of disaster itself**. There is however almost no focus on the **limited capacity to respond effectively to disaster** -- or on why recognition of probable future "disaster" is so challenging as a "surprise", to the point that such possibilities are simply and effectively denied.

This goes beyond notions of "emergency preparedness", as argued separately (*Remedial Capacity Indicators versus Performance Indicators*, 1981; *Recognizing the Psychosocial Boundaries of Remedial Action: constraints on ensuring a safe operating space for humanity*, 2009).

Humanity's disastrous capacity to respond to disaster can then also be recognized in the **much-challenged capacity to elicit and apply collective intelligence in response to any disaster**, as well-illustrated by the recent [Deepwater Horizon oil spill](#) (*Enabling Collective Intelligence in Response to Emergencies*, 2010). The challenge can also be recognized in the problematic response to regulation of the global financial system following the experience of the financial crisis of 2008-2010. It was evident in the chaotic organization in response to the [Asian earthquake and tsunami](#) (2004).

As argued in the case of the response to the financial crisis, there would seem to be a fundamentally disastrous incapacity of humanity to engage with threatening and potentially threatening conditions after the fact, but more especially before the fact (*Climate Change as a Metaphor of Social Change: Systemic implications of emissions, ozone, sunlight, greenhouse and overheating*, 2008; *Sins of Hot Air Emission, Omission, Commission and Promise: the political challenge of responding to global crises*, 2009).

There is even the possibility that humanity has a heavy investment in processes which exacerbate the risk of disaster -- and are known to do so -- whilst simultaneously denying the validity of arguments highlighting this. This has been most clearly seen with respect to the

Fukushima nuclear reactor disaster (*Anticipating Future Strategic Triple Whammies: In the light of earthquake-tsunami-nuclear misconceptions*, 2011). A subsequent report by the International Atomic Energy Agency (*Fukushima Nuclear Accident Update Log*, 2 June 2011) shows that Tepco, the firm that ran the stricken plant at Fukushima, had under-estimated the danger of tsunamis, had not planned properly for multiple plant failures and had been allowed to get away with it by a regulator that failed to review its protective measures. Analogous practices by nuclear operators worldwide have been repeatedly described.

Acts of God?

There is of course a contrasting perspective offered by the sense in which any such disasters are to be framed as Acts of God. This argument can be made with respect to both the "failure of the rains" in the Horn of Africa and the earthquake/tsunami which resulted in the Fukushima disaster. This framing features in many cultures in which such environmental processes are associated with the mysterious activities and powers of deities. Many continue to address prayers to such deities -- for a successful harvest and the like. Rituals continue to be practiced to placate such deities and elicit their support -- even in the most developed regions.

When disaster does strike, many cultures then have the capacity to reframe the consequences (philosophically) as the "Will of God" -- about which little can necessarily be done by humans (*Acts of God vs Acts of al-Qaida: Hurricane Katrina as a message to Bible Belt America?* 2005). This is of course completely contrary to the atheistic philosophy promoted by many scientists of repute who are held to be influential in framing strategic responses (*Richard Dawkins, The God Delusion*, 2006).

This "Act of God" language has long been adopted by the insurance industry to identify disasters for which compensation is far more limited, if not totally precluded -- notably because of their unpredictability and scope. It may be asked to what extent this is a definitional convenience, rather than a cynical failure to engage responsibly with the possibility of such situations.

This failure is of course consistent with the progress towards scripturally-prophesied disastrous *end times scenarios* -- a prelude to final harmony, and joyously anticipated for that reason. The religious understanding of humanitarian disaster is therefore inherently suspect -- with the enabling of disasters even to be seen as a means of "hastening God's Hand" (*Spontaneous Initiation of Armageddon: a heartfelt response to systemic negligence*, 2004).

Curiously the insurance industry is especially attentive, through adjustment of premiums, to the installation of devices to mitigate against some obvious disasters. This is most evident in the fire protection devices in buildings and in the periodic technical verification of vehicles. But the insurance industry is not renowned for its attentiveness to the factors inhibiting emergency preparedness of the "humanitarian" kind. It may even be complicit, to a degree, in the construction of buildings on land subject to flooding. However that industry is increasingly attentive to risks of rising sea levels and has already taken steps to discontinue coverage of man made dwellings in many coastal areas -- effectively "retreating to higher ground". It is seemingly indifferent to the quality and scope of systems analysis relating to potential disaster. The insurance issues of the Fukushima disaster, and its predecessors in Japan, have highlighted the manner in which the insurance industry has declined effective involvement.

Whilst designing into the cost of nuclear reactor initiatives the cost of their final decommissioning has had a sobering effect on their acceptance, the premiums with respect to probable accidents and Acts of God has not.

Controversially and provocatively it might be asked whether the marked historical proclivity of many religions for individual "sacrifice" has effectively been transmogrified into a strange tolerance of collective "sacrifice". This might be said to be evident in the passive response to recent large scale massacres -- if not in a degree of complicity in them through their adherents.

Systemic human neglect

Contrasting the framing of "humanitarian disaster" and "Acts of God" is a device used here to raise the question of the extent to which both framings constitute what might be construed as a disguise for "systemic neglect". To what extent is disaster, whether framed as either "humanitarian" or an "Act of God", then to be more responsibly and specifically understood as systemic neglect on the part of humanity? (*Disastrous Floods as Indicators of Systemic Risk Neglect: implications for authoritative response to future surprises*, 2011)

In a sense both "humanitarian disaster" and "Acts of God" offer a means of implying that the disaster is not a human responsibility. Humans are then, through this framing, to be understood as "victims" of processes far outside their control -- despite proudly considering themselves as "conquerors of nature". This suggests that the extensive literature on "victim mentality" should be mined to determine the relevance of those arguments to such disasters and possible attitudes thereafter. Such literature has most notably highlighted individual responsibility, especially from a feminist perspective in response to the personal "disasters" to which individuals may be exposed.

The argument may be brought to a sharper focus with respect to the analysis -- from the systems perspective of the relevant sciences -- of how the systems are defined from which instabilities and disasters emerge. Where do catastrophes "come from" in the light of catastrophe theory and complexity theory -- especially in the light of cognitive psychology (*George Lakoff and Rafael Nuñez, Where Mathematics Comes From: how the embodied mind brings mathematics into being*, 2001)?

Is it possible that the systems so assiduously studied are explored by ignoring precisely those factors which render them vulnerable to disaster -- through neglecting those systemic features by which catastrophe is enabled. Is the essence of "humanitarian disaster" what might then indeed be understood as "human systemic negligence" (cf *John Gall, Systemantics: the underground text of systems lore -- how systems really work and how they fail*, General Systemantics Press, 1986)?

Such negligence, and the failure to recognize it, may of course be most conveniently projected onto "God". This is especially ironical to the extent that in relation to natural disasters, it might well be conveniently assumed that the deity *Gaia* is the "governor of last resort" by whom the resolution of such matters is expected by humanity. Essentially it might then be asked whether "disaster" is a remedial strategy

of Gaia following the failure of humanity to manage its relationship with the environment more effectively.

Focus of neglect in systemic analysis

The argument here builds on that mentioned above (*Recognizing the Psychosocial Boundaries of Remedial Action: constraints on ensuring a safe operating space for humanity*, 2009). It raises the question whether the conventional analysis of systems from which disasters emerge is undertaken through some combination of **silos thinking**, "tunnel vision" or **groupthink** (*Groupthink: the Search for Archaeoraptor as a Metaphoric Tale*, 2002). In effect this is a form of "conceptual gerrymandering" -- shifting system boundaries to exclude matters more conveniently treated as "**externalities**" to be ignored to the extent possible (*Conceptual gerrymandering and definitional game-playing*, 2002).

This results in systems which are effectively conceptual "**comfort zones**" -- disruptive influences having been designed out of the elegance of the model. This would tend to result in the conception and design of strategies which specifically neglect core issues which have thereby been conveniently denied (*Lipoproblems: Developing a Strategy Omitting a Key Problem -- the systemic challenge of climate change and resource issues*, 2009). This pattern is consistent with that determined by the formal investigation into the "intelligence failure" in failing to anticipate 9/11 -- and the recognized "**failure of imagination**" (cf *Report on the U.S. Intelligence Community's Pre-War Assessments on Iraq*, 9 July 2004; Lord Butler's *Review of Intelligence of Weapons of Mass Destruction*, 13 July 2004).

Those core issues become a feature of the "unsaid", so characteristic of global society (*Global Strategic Implications of the Unsaid*, 2003). Its consequences may also be understood in the terms of **John Ralston Saul** (*The Unconscious Civilization*, 1995). The question might be asked as to where questions are asked regarding the nature of what is neglected in strategic analysis that is purportedly "comprehensive". Where is the relevant higher-order **critical thinking**? More specifically, what is the consequence of asking such questions -- notably with respect to the professional careers and reputations of those asking them?

There is a tendency to reduce conventional systemic analysis of issues to what it is assumed can be treated as "objective" and "non-controversial" -- since this is most susceptible to research funding and subsequent strategic support. In a sense it is precisely the factors which are not of this nature which are excluded from the comfortable neutrality of the analysis (*Defining the objective ∞ Refining the subjective ?!: Explaining reality ∞ Embodying realization* 2011). It is these "human factors" which result in costly disasters, as in the case of the neglect effectively designed into Fukushima as a vulnerability.

It is also typically these other factors which undermine support for such strategic initiatives -- specifically in their implementation. **There is therefore a strong case for designing topical "hot potatoes" into systems analysis, even though they constitute what might be termed a "psychoactive threat"** -- by analogy to the threat of radioactivity which has had to be circumvented in the design of nuclear reactors. The issue of "overpopulation" offers an example of a "hot potato" (*Overpopulation Debate as a Psychosocial Hazard: development of safety guidelines from handling other hazardous materials*, 2009).

Real face of humanitarian disaster?

Framed in this way, are the images of "humanitarian disaster" -- the impoverished, the homeless, the malnourished, the starving, the ill, the dying, -- more fruitfully to be understood as a mirror for those who perpetuate systemic neglect? Much is made of the "innocence" of those who suffer in this way -- as victims of conditions beyond their control. Those formulating policies characterized by neglect would also claim "innocence" individually and as characteristic of their discipline and profession. A discipline might even be caricatured as an exercise in structured denial of responsibility -- by analogy with the "limited responsibility of corporations".

As a mirror, however, can the condition of those portrayed be reframed as more usefully relating to those who perpetuate that neglect -- policy analysts and their sponsors:

- their conceptual "impoverishment"
- their intellectual and humanitarian "malnourishment"
- their cognitive "ills" (*Mimetic and Information Diseases in a Knowledge Society*, 2008)
- their effective cognitive "death" -- of which "stillborn" projects might be an indicator

Is it the policy-framers and policy-makers who are best reflected -- as caricatures -- in the media images of those suffering in the Horn of Africa? As with the electorate observing those images on TV? (*Looking in the Mirror -- at Josef Fritzl ? Global conditions on reflection*, 2009).

Curiously, faced with a humanitarian disaster resulting from an analytical neglect "by the head", an appeal is made for a response "from the heart". The gesture called for is a donation of financial resources. Many individuals are required to face the consequent dilemma on a daily basis in those cities in which begging by the homeless, gypsies, etc is commonplace. All that is supposedly required is money. Religions make frequent use of the dilemma and its obligations.

This framing comes at a curious time in global history however, when the nature and condition of the financial system is in question -- especially in the light of the social inequalities highlighted by those who benefit from it to what is claimed to be an obscene degree. The recent financial crisis highlighted the recognition that the viability of that system depended to a high degree on confidence and trust -- of which monetary tokens are recognized as tangible symbols.

The post-crisis articulation of necessary regulation of the financial system (to the extent that it is evident) is widely recognized as a tokenistic disaster. Its relation to collective confidence is worth stressing (as discussed below). It is the "confidence system" which is disastrously regulated and might well be understood as the essential "humanitarian disaster".

Responsibility of God?

Beyond the convenience of the insurance industry, how is God to be understood as intimately involved in humanitarian disaster -- however that is understood?

Global society is confronted with various dynamics in this respect:

- the fundamental importance of God and belief in many countries, developed and developing -- even to the point of superseding all other considerations, even by policy-makers (if only in their opportunistic attentiveness to their electorates)
- a major counter-current from a secular perspective, notably with the atheistic emphases offered by many scientists and others of repute (Dawkins, etc)
- specific impact on policies and freedoms regarding the rights of individuals, most notably articulated by the [Pro-Life / Pro-Choice](#) debate regarding abortion and extended to use of contraceptives
- religious encouragement of procreation in accordance with scriptural injunctions and irrespective of any conventional resource constraints ("God will provide")
- conflation of the previous point with the obligation to ensure faith-based cultural identity through competitive procreation
- policies, resulting from the legislative implications of the previous points, effectively inhibiting or prohibiting any form of family planning

These factors all result in highly constrained research on a system (usefully to be caricatured as "blinkered"), which effectively sustains conventional policies such as to render their implementation vulnerable to disaster.

The issue then to be highlighted is how this pattern is sustained. What institutions or individuals are ensuring that deeper analysis is inhibited or severely biased -- irrespective of the possible justification for their perspective?

As fruitfully made clear by the [Billy Connolly](#) movie *The Man Who Sued God* (2001) -- in response to a disastrous Act of God for which the insurance industry declined all responsibility -- the only possibility is to seek recourse for any humanitarian disaster from those who claim unambiguously to be the Agents of God within global society. This applies most notably to the interpretation of the Will of God in which they claim unique insight.

It would appear, at least within their own terms, that it is the worldview represented by the various religions which is responsible to a degree for those disasters in ways which merit careful attention. Appropriate to a paradoxical situation, it is also the case that those worldviews are responsible, to a certain degree, for any collective sensitivity to the associated suffering -- which might otherwise be simply declared to be a fact of life and a consequence of *Realpolitik*.

Exacerbating disastrous system instability through enabling population increase

Separately the argument has been developed that many conventional policy challenges, including those highlighted in the case of humanitarian disasters, are directly exacerbated by increases in population (*Institutionalized Shunning of Overpopulation Challenge: incommunicability of fundamentally inconvenient truth*, 2008; *United Nations Overpopulation Denial Conference: exploring the underside of climate change*, 2009). This is most obvious in the case of food, shelter, water resources, energy, and the like. The majority of problems of this kind would be significantly reduced if "demand" for resources was reduced -- namely population.

This should not however be construed as an argument for immediate reduction in the population. It is an argument for restraint on population increase in relation to the challenge of resource availability. A more provocative interpretation is of course possible (*Challenge of Nonviolent Population Decimation: reducing effects of overpopulation on resources and climate change by major reduction in the height of people*, 2007)

Whilst the case is readily made that these issues are merely a question of better distribution of resources, it is clear that many societies, developed and developing, are much challenged at present in ensuring that their existing delivery systems are effective -- even for existing levels of population. This is notably evident in the case of health, education and care -- and "jobs", to the extent that the population expects these to be "delivered". It is far from clear that humanity has the capacity to develop more adequate production/distribution systems -- whether in the immediate or longer-term future -- without destroying the environment on which it is variously dependent and which is valued as a feature of quality of life.

Under such circumstances, in anticipation of possible breakthrough, prudence is appropriate in accordance with the [Precautionary Principle](#) -- most notably with respect to any probability of further destabilization of the global system. It is indeed appropriate to explore the assumption, universally held, that the system in its current state is actually governable as so readily imagined (*Ungovernability of Sustainable Global Democracy? Towards engaging appropriately with time*, 2011).

It might be said that the worldview of religions, sustaining current recklessness with regard to exploitation of resources, should be more clearly and precisely integrated into any policy analysis of the manner in which instabilities are exacerbated. The methodology mentioned above highlights one approach to the debate (*Overpopulation Debate as a Psychosocial Hazard: development of safety guidelines from handling other hazardous materials*, 2009). The exacerbation of system instabilities has, for example, been argued in relation to "systematic" denial of the population dimension in the case of the climate change issue (*United Nations Overpopulation Denial Conference: exploring the underside of climate change*, 2009).

The responsibility of religion may indeed be variously exaggerated (*Root Irresponsibility for Major World Problems: the unexamined role of Abrahamic faiths in sustaining unrestrained population growth*, 2007; *Begetting: challenges and responsibilities of overpopulation*, 2007). Such arguments need to be modulated for effective consideration of the system dynamics enabling humanitarian disaster.

Reframing of "carbon emissions" in relation to humanitarian disaster Open letter from the UK Houses of Parliament
<p><i>Family planning is key in the fight against famine:</i> Your editorial (<i>The Guardian</i>, 7 July 2011) was quite right to point out that disaster relief is an essential response to humanitarian crises, and that prevention of and preparation for future disasters is crucially important. However, unless we address population growth through reproductive health, the scale of relief required in the future will only increase.</p> <p>Food supplies and future agricultural investment will be useless unless we also fund family planning and reproductive health programmes to relieve the pressure of ever-growing populations.</p> <p>Ten years after the last drought, Ethiopia is facing another food crisis, due to drought. Other areas are similarly affected and the four countries currently threatened with famine - Ethiopia, Somalia, Kenya and Uganda - have seen their populations grow from 41 million in 1960 to 167 million. This huge growth in population cancels out any improvements in food production.</p> <p>Women in the region want to delay or avoid further pregnancies, but do not have access to contraception. What funding there was has stalled in recent years. It is crucial that these women's contraceptive needs are met, together with the food aid, otherwise in 10 or 15 years' time, those children we save now will be bringing their children to feeding centres in a desperate attempt to save their lives.</p> <p>Jenny Tonge, <i>Lib Dem (House of Lords)</i> and Richard Ottaway MP, <i>Conservative All-party group on population, development and reproductive health</i></p>
<p>Generic argument developed in Sins of Hot Air Emission, Omission, Commission and Promise: the political challenge of responding to global crises (2009)</p>

Who are the enablers of pain and suffering?

At its simplest -- faced with thousands, if not millions, lacking food, water, and shelter, and suffering extremes of ill health resulting in disease -- who can be said to be the primary agents in enabling this suffering? Framed as an "Act of God" or a "humanitarian disaster", it might be readily assumed that this guarantees that no single agent is responsible.

Strangely this logic has been deployed with regard to the recent financial crisis. No one claims responsibility and everyone indulges in a blame game of pointing the finger elsewhere -- or makes the assumption that it is a systemic issue beyond human control. Nevertheless thousands, if not millions were affected, with many rendered homeless -- even in the most developed countries. Who enabled that crisis? Who curtailed initiatives by which it might have been avoided or constrained?

The question is whether such "happenings" are susceptible of any more fruitful analysis. Is global society indeed inherently ungovernable -- being too complex to be encompassed by human logic, strategic insight and management ability? This was a theme of the above-mentioned exploration ([Ungovernability of Sustainable Global Democracy? Towards engaging appropriately with time](#), 2011). In the case of the millions at risk of death by starvation, what dynamics favoured the encounter with suffering and how were these enabled?

Curiously religion is often extremely explicit regarding the vital role of suffering in enabling enlightenment in anticipation of a heavenly afterlife. Some religions might be said to value suffering and to welcome it as a primary source of learning. Some rituals and practices are deliberately based on experiencing the suffering of the body. There is therefore a sense in which religion is complicit in what might otherwise be understood as a perverse indulgence in suffering. Humanitarian disasters, potentially in conformity with Divine Will, are then a feature of this process. For some they may even be usefully facilitated in conformity with such inspiration -- "helping God". They may be understood as offering an opportunity to others (possibly forcibly) to engage in charity as a value much to be appreciated -- thus to be understood as a religious lesson. Cynically, within their larger scheme of things, religions can "afford" the death of millions in the service of a higher cause.

Such arguments point to the ambiguity of religion in the face of the suffering of millions. The argument above suggests that the probability of such suffering is significantly increased through increasing the population and its pressure on resources. It may well be argued that the resources available to humanity are fully capable of sustaining such numbers. It may also be argued that some countries are reproducing below the replacement rate.

The fact that humanity is however much-challenged to design procedures to meet the needs of existing numbers -- even in developed countries purportedly faced with a replacement challenge -- suggests that favouring such increases is imprudent, to say the least. It can be construed as deliberately creating a situation in which extreme suffering will occur as a form of strategic blackmail to oblige others to subscribe to a perspective, framed as an accurate interpretation of Divine Will. The implication that populations in excess of local resources should be freely allowed to immigrate to countries experiencing decreasing numbers -- as favoured by the German Green movement -- fails to address issues currently giving rise to a reversion to nationalist politics.

The only insightful solution offered by religion is that -- following from full conversion to Divine Will -- the problematic human situation will be resolved under the guidance of religion. Faith is supposedly all that is required. Unfortunately religions, through their faithful adherents, continue to exemplify the inadequacy of this logic through the conflicts which they engender -- and in which they have indulged over centuries. Each of course claims that it is through their particular worldview that resolution is uniquely possible. However this style of thinking has not enabled them to convince others of the primacy of their perspective. Upholding this view in the face of extreme suffering would seem to exemplify extreme perversity.

It must then be asked who are the primary actors in enabling this suffering through deliberately encouraging procreation beyond current

human capacity to manage the resource requirements. Is the question of the same problematic form as that relating to responsibility for the instabilities in the global financial system -- emblematic as it is of collective confidence in global civilization? How are such matters to be discussed when the existing modes of discourse have long proven to be inadequate to the clarification of controversial issues?

Role of the Abrahamic religions

It is unclear whether the Abrahamic religions can be usefully indicated as primarily responsible for enabling collective suffering. It is reasonably clear that representatives of those religions have been active in blocking international debate on possible strategic initiatives in response to increasing population numbers within currently accessible resources. It is an irony of the highest order that it is secular China, through its [one-child policy](#), that endeavoured to respond to the issue -- most controversially. The Abrahamic religions have had nothing to offer and have essentially exhibited indifference to the issue -- except when threatened by competitive procreation.

Because of their organizational form, it is the Christian Pope -- widely upheld as the primary representative of God on Earth -- who has exemplified resistance to any creative response to the challenge of human procreation and the consequent population increase. This has been evident in the Vatican diplomatic efforts in relation to discussion of the population issue in international arenas, notably at the seemingly abandoned [UN Conferences on Population](#).

In the human drama, possibly best to be framed in mythical terms, it is the Pope who can be most directly indicated as enabling the suffering of millions. It is in the nature of current discourse that this would be immediately denied as (ill-intentioned) misrepresentation -- an argument to be quashed. Does this pattern suggest that any such argument and its denial is of the same form as that relating to others implicated in the suffering and death of millions?

How do individuals acquire positions of deniable responsibility in modern institutions resulting in human suffering -- notably by withholding assistance to millions, thereby guaranteeing vicious cycles of suffering? How to compare the cases of those variously cited, and possibly indicted, for "crimes against humanity" -- Henry Kissinger, Augusto Pinochet, Muammar Gaddafi, Adolf Eichmann, Ratko Mladic, Pol Pot. All have significantly claimed their innocence, often with the support of those of highest repute. Less controversially, how might the Pope be compared with Kofi Annan in the light of his "innocent" role on the occasion of the genocide in Rwanda -- especially in the light of controversy over the complicity of the Pope's predecessor, [Pius XII](#), in relation to Nazi atrocities ([John Cornwell, Hitler's Pope](#), 1999)?

Should such "agents of suffering" be compared with others "embedded" in institutions -- whether as people of faith or in a context of faith-based governance? Examples would include the US Secretary of State, [Madeleine Albright](#), who commented on the death of 500,000 children in Iraq as a result of sanctions occasioned by the United State: "*we think the price is worth it*"?

Obedience to orders in enabling humanitarian disaster

A curious feature of many humanitarian disasters is the manner in which they are enabled by obedience to "orders" as these may be variously understood -- notably in the light of religious injunctions and spiritual inspiration. This has been the subject of extensive commentary (Luther N. Norene, *Obedience to Orders as a Defense to a Criminal Act*, 1971; [Jacob G. Hornberger, Obedience to God or Obedience to Orders?](#) 2009):

- **Adolf Eichmann:** He was responsible for the task of facilitating and managing the logistics of mass deportation of Jews to ghettos and extermination camps in German-occupied Eastern Europe. During his entire trial, Eichmann insisted that he was only "following orders". This was the same [Nuremberg Defence](#) used by some of the Nazi war criminals during the 1945-1946 [Nuremberg Trials](#). Eichmann explicitly declared that he had abdicated his conscience in order to follow the *Führerprinzip*. As such he claimed to be merely a "transmitter" with very little power. He testified that: "*I never did anything, great or small, without obtaining in advance express instructions from Adolf Hitler or any of my superiors.*" During cross-examination, when asked if he considered himself guilty of the murder of some five million Jews. Eichmann replied: "*Legally not, but in the human sense ... yes, for I am guilty of having deported them.*"
- **Kofi Annan:** He was Director of [UN Peacekeeping Operations](#) (March 1993 - December 1996). The [Rwandan Genocide](#) took place in 1994 during that period. In a subsequent analysis, the force commander of the [United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda](#), claimed that Annan was overly passive in his response to the imminent genocide ([Roméo Dallaire, Shake Hands with the Devil: the failure of humanity in Rwanda](#), 2003). the book asserts that Annan held back UN troops from intervening to settle the conflict, and from providing more logistical and material support. Annan failed to provide responses to repeated requests for access to a weapons depository by which the endangered [Tutsis](#) could have been defended. Subsequent to the genocide in which an estimated 800,000 people were killed, Annan declared "*I could and should have done more to sound the alarm and rally support.*" ([UN chief's Rwanda genocide regret, BBC News](#). 26 March 2004). Arguably his prime reason for not doing so was his obedience to directives from the UN Security Council -- which he chose to respect, whatever the consequences for the lives of thousands. The matter continues to be highly controversial ([Kofi Annan responds to Rwanda allegations over "Genocide" report, Rwanda News Agency](#), 2 September 2010). Kofi Annan was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2001.
- **Ratko Mladic:** As the top military general with command responsibility, he has been indicted by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) for genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity, most notably with respect to the [Srebrenica massacre](#) (1995) -- the largest mass murder in Europe since the immediate aftermath of World War II. Considerable controversy continues to surround the role of the Dutch UN Peacekeepers in Srebrenica, notably under the responsibility of the UN Director of Peacekeeping Operations, Kofi Annan. As recently ruled by a Dutch court, troops should not have allowed men to leave a safe area or fall into the hands of Bosnian Serb forces (Ian Traynor, *Dutch state responsible for three Srebrenica deaths*,

- **Henry Kissinger:** As National Security Adviser to Richard Nixon, Kissinger played a key role in a [secret bombing campaign in Cambodia](#) as well as the 1970 [Cambodian Incursion](#) and subsequent widespread bombing of Cambodia. The bombing campaign contributed to the chaos of the [Cambodian Civil War](#), which saw the forces of dictator Lon Nol unable to retain foreign support to combat the growing [Khmer Rouge](#) insurgency that would overthrow him in 1975 (and enable the subsequent massacre). The American bombing of Cambodia killed an estimated 40,000 combatants and civilians. It has been asserted that the bombing may have increased recruitment for the Khmer Rouge ([Christopher Hitchens](#), *The Trial of Henry Kissinger*, 2001). Following election of Chilean presidential candidate [Salvador Allende](#) in 1970, the Nixon administration authorized the CIA to encourage a military coup that would prevent Allende's inauguration, but the plan was not successful although Allende was overthrown in 1973 resulting in the establishment of a dictatorship under [Augusto Pinochet](#). According to various reports and investigations 1,200 - 3,200 people were killed, up to 80,000 were interned, and up to 30,000 were tortured by that regime including women and children. The extent of Kissinger's involvement in or support of these plans, tacit or otherwise, is a subject of continuing controversy. He was awarded the 1973 Nobel Peace Prize.
- **George W. Bush:** Irrespective of the resulting deaths, Bush is alleged to have clearly stated that he was on a mission from God when he launched the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq ([Ewen MacAskill](#), *George Bush: 'God told me to end the tyranny in Iraq'*, *The Guardian*, 7 October 2005; [Rupert Cornwell](#), *Bush: God told me to invade Iraq*, *The Independent*, 7 October, 2005). Although consistent with other remarks, this account was subsequently denied and considered "absurd" ([James Sturcke](#), *White House denies Bush God claims*, *The Guardian*, 7 October 2005). According to one definitive account of the US administration's road to war in Iraq by [Bob Woodward](#) (*Plan of Attack*, 2004), after giving the order to invade in March 2003, Bush walked in the White House garden, praying "that our troops be safe, be protected by the Almighty", informing Woodward: "I was praying for strength to do the Lord's will". And "I'm surely not going to justify war based upon God. Understand that. Nevertheless, in my case, I pray that I will be as good a messenger of His will as possible. And then of course, I pray for forgiveness." According to French President Jacques Chirac, Bush told him in early 2003 that Iraq must be invaded to thwart [Gog and Magog](#), the Bible's satanic agents of the Apocalypse ([James A. Haught](#), *A French Revelation, or The Burning Bush, Secular Humanism*; [Thomas Römer](#), *George W. Bush et le Code Ezéchiél, Allez Savoir!*, Septembre 2007; *Bush, Gog and Magog*, *The Guardian*, 10 August 2009). At the time of writing, a report released by [Human Rights Watch](#) claims the Obama administration is 'failing to act on evidence' with respect to the complicity of Bush in use of torture, also naming [Dick Cheney](#) and [Donald Rumsfeld](#) (*George W Bush should be prosecuted over torture, says human rights group*, *The Guardian*, 12 July 2011).
- **Tony Blair:** In subsequent interviews, as with George Bush, Blair has referred to the role of his Christian faith in his decision to go to war in Iraq -- thereby enabling the death and suffering of hundreds of thousands. Might he be said, like Bush, to have taken his orders from God, or be carrying out God's will? He has stated that he had prayed about the issue, affirming that God would judge him for his decision: *I think if you have faith about these things, you realise that judgement is made by other people and if you believe in God, it's made by God as well.* (*Blair 'prayed to God' over Iraq*, *BBC News*, 3 March 2006). Despite the hundreds of thousands of deaths in which he was complicit through policies he enabled -- he has subsequently affirmed "I believe I was right" ([Leslie Docksey](#), *The Long road to the Hague: prosecuting former Prime-Minister Tony Blair*, August 2010). He subsequently converted to Catholicism which offers total absolution of sins.

The relationship of each of these enablers to what they interpret as "orders" from "higher authority" is usefully, if provocatively, highlighted by a comparison of the case of Adolf Eichmann with that of Kofi Annan (*Perplexing Symmetries in Obedience to Orders: equivalencies in the moral abdication of Adolf Eichmann and Kofi Annan?* 1998). Both enabled disaster by obedience to orders as well as by failure to disobey orders which would have avoided the disastrous consequences for the lives of many others. In the case of Eichmann, this would have placed his own life in jeopardy, whereas in the case of Annan, it would have placed his professional life in jeopardy. Subsequent to these events, as UN Secretary-General, Annan courageously named the Iraq intervention to be "illegal" (*Iraq war illegal, says Annan*, *BBC News*, 16 September 2004). The issue of jeopardy is illustrated by the fact that he was not re-appointed as UN Secretary-General.

Extensive investigation and debate have surrounded the controversial issue of the humanitarian disaster associated with the extrajudicial imprisonment (in [Guantanamo Bay](#)) and "torture" of those detained during the course of coalition operations in response to terrorism, most notably those from Iraq and Afghanistan. The US administration has disassociated itself from the dramatic [images from the Abu Ghraib prison](#) -- condemned as illustrating the initiatives of "bad apples" who were specifically declared to be not following orders -- despite controversial evidence to the contrary ([Philippe Sands](#), *Torture Team: Rumsfeld's Memo and the Betrayal of American Values*, 2008). Further official investigation has now been terminated ([Tom Carter](#), *Obama Administration Shuts Down Investigations Into Bush-era Torture*, *Global Research*, 5 July 2011).

At the time of writing major issues regarding the media and politicians have arisen in relation to phone hacking by the media in the UK, specifically by certain journalists of a 168-year old tabloid, *News of the World*. Again a "bad apple" argument is used by the most senior executives of the paper in denying all responsibility. This suggests that the "bad apple" (or "rotten apple") defence, like the "Nuremberg Defence" (also termed the [Superior Orders](#) plea) is engendered by a corporate culture committed to a strange form of [cultural violence](#). The defence is characteristic of **a culture in which the implicit message from authority is to "get results", "whatever it takes" -- but do not report how this was achieved, and responsibility for such a requirement will be denied, as with any knowledge of the process, or any implication that it was duly authorised.** It is effectively created as a pattern of deniable responsibility or [plausible deniability](#).

Such deniability is celebrated in movie representations of secret agents (James Bond, etc) -- to be disowned if caught. An ironic feature

of the secular variants of such cultures is that the highest authorities within them may well be associated with "God" in some way in informal discourse (Peter Preston, *News of the World scandal: God's newspaper executive less than visionary*, *The Observer*, 10 July 2011; *Rupert Murdoch sues God over rights to the word 'sky'*, *NewsBiscuit*, 12 August 2010). References of this kind helpfully highlight how the diffuse and pervasive nature of such influence is experienced within the culture.

The phone-hacking scandal perpetrated by employees of *News of the World*, currently engulfing Murdoch's empire, is now reported as having ignited a crisis of investor confidence comparable to that of the BP Gulf of Mexico oil spill disaster. Experts indicate that investors are concerned that the enabling culture prevails throughout that empire (*Phone hacking: Murdoch paid US anti-bribery law lobbyists*, *The Guardian*, 15 July 2001).

The more general question raised by this argument is whether the unquestioning obedience to the injunctions of God -- effectively the "Superior Orders" -- is a prime enabler of disaster through the manner in which it is exploited -- most evidently by "bad apples" operating within a context of plausible deniability.

This pattern has been most dramatically evident in the case of the widespread scandals of sexual abuse by clergy -- concerning which authorities are able to deny responsibility. It is unclear how higher Catholic authority disclaims responsibility for the famed exploitation of so-called "fallen women" in Ireland in the "Magdalene asylums" -- finally investigated in the 1990s (*Child Abuse Commission Report*, 2009). Degrees of responsibility are currently being clarified in a UK court case to determine whether the relationship between bishop and priest is similar to that between employers and staff (Riazat Butt and Owen Bowcott, *Court to decide Catholic church liability for priest abuse*, *The Guardian*, 6 July 2011). In presenting the results of a judicial inquiry into Catholic child sex abuse in the Cloyne Diocese in Ireland (*The Cloyne Report*, July 2011), the Minister for Justice indicated with respect to the representative of the Pope that: *It is truly scandalous that people who presented a public face of concern continued to maintain a private agenda of concealment and evasion (Inadequate. Inappropriate. Ineffective. Entirely unhelpful*, *The Irish Times*, 14 July 2011).

From a [quality control](#) perspective, what proportion of "rotten apples" justify rejection or withdrawal of a batch? How is that percentage affected by intrinsic danger, as with the [product recall](#) of defective automobiles or poisoned food products? In the case of the Catholic child sex abuse scandal, are the clergy implicated then to be considered "defective" or "toxic"? What proportion would justify "withdrawal" of the batch -- or even a shut down of the institution, as with *News of the World*? Could the extinction of species -- as "batch recall" -- be understood as Gaia's version of quality control?

Does this pattern also apply in the fatal abuse of populations deliberately rendered vulnerable to humanitarian disaster through inhibiting more proactive anticipatory response? **Why are 10 million people at risk of death by starvation and illness at the time of writing?** More generally, how is it that 1.02 billion people hungry people have been engendered by humanity (*One sixth of humanity undernourished: more than ever before*, *FAO Media Centre*, 19 June 2009)?

Primary leadership role of the Christian papacy

[The Pope](#) is acknowledged by the faithful to have the full and supreme power of jurisdiction over the universal Church, not only in things which pertain to faith and morals, but also in those which pertain to the discipline and government of the Church spread over the whole world. As such he is understood to have a special relationship to God, notably in the interpretation of the Will of God, as it is embodied in the form of injunctions in the scriptures. The [critical aftermath](#) of the above-mentioned critique of Pius XII (John Cornwell, *Hitler's Pope*, 1999) therefore merits careful attention.

Cornwell has seemingly "recanted" to a degree (presumably in response to pressure), notably as articulated in a later work (*The Pontiff in Winter*, 2004) framing the case in language which might well be borrowed in apologies for other enablers of humanitarian disaster: *I would now argue, in the light of the debates and evidence following 'Hitler's Pope', that Pius XII had so little scope of action that it is impossible to judge the motives for his silence during the war, while Rome was under the heel of Mussolini and later occupied by the Germans*. In response to further criticism, he subsequently qualified this retraction: *Nevertheless, due to his ineffectual and diplomatic language in respect of the Nazis and the Jews, I still believe that it was incumbent on him to explain his failure to speak out after the war. This he never did*.

The matter of the role and freedom of effective enablers has been brought into much sharper focus in relation to legal arguments regarding the widespread (and extensively documented) scandal of [sexual abuse](#) of innocents within the institutions of the Catholic Church -- during the mandates of a succession of Popes for whom fast-track canonisation is now sought. Does the systemic nature of such abuses constitute a "crime against humanity" -- or more particularly its neglect? To what extent is this abuse to be understood as enabled by the "insouciance" of the person acclaimed as the ultimate authority within that institution -- a protector of the faithful (on behalf of God)? Does such an authority have no responsibility for what happens "on his watch" -- despite his divine mandate?

Should the Pope -- whatever his constraints -- then be considered a "prime enabler" of the suffering associated with humanitarian disasters arising from excessive demand on scarce resources? Could these have been mitigated long ago through more insightful consideration of resource constraints, especially in a context of the challenging geography of drought-vulnerable regions? Whatever the arguments and appeals to authority, spiritual or otherwise, should those implicated not encourage a more fruitful articulation of these views -- however subtle -- rather than appearing to be intimately involved in suppressing any possibility of reframing the debate? Has a primary concern of the Papacy been to frame the debate on population increase such as to increase the suffering in order to hasten fulfillment of eschatological prophecies?

Controversially and provocatively -- but following from the above argument -- is the Pope to be considered the real face of humanitarian disaster? Is he the embodiment of the problematic failure of humanity to respond self-reflexively to its own disastrous conditions and dangerous proclivities? As the acclaimed representative of God -- previously embodied by Jesus explicitly in order to take on the problems of humanity as a whole -- should the Pope as inheritor of that role not then be understood as the real face of humanitarian

disaster? How is it that images of the suffering of those in the Horn of Africa resemble more closely Jesus undergoing crucifixion than those of a benevolent Pope appealing for charitable action by others? And, more controversially, is his inaction in response to the accumulating potential for further disaster from population increase, not also to be construed as an Act of God -- possibly a form of withholding characteristic of **tough love**?

In his the commentary on presenting the above-mentioned **Cloyne Report** on clerical sexual abuse, the Irish Prime Minister was scathing in his criticism of the problematic attitude of the Vatican with respect to that matter (Henry McDonald, *Irish prime minister attacks Vatican*, *The Guardian*, 20 July 2011). He indicated that it highlighted dysfunction and elitism in Rome, and that the Vatican seemed more interested in upholding the church's reputation than confronting sexual abuse. Might it not be the case that this attitude applies to other issues such as overpopulation -- with fatal consequences thereby enabled, as is currently only too evident in Africa?

Should humanitarian disasters then be considered as Acts of God -- at least as enabled by those considered to be acting on "his" behalf as "his" accredited representatives? More generally, framed in this way, are the Abrahamic religions then to be considered as the primary enablers of Acts of God?

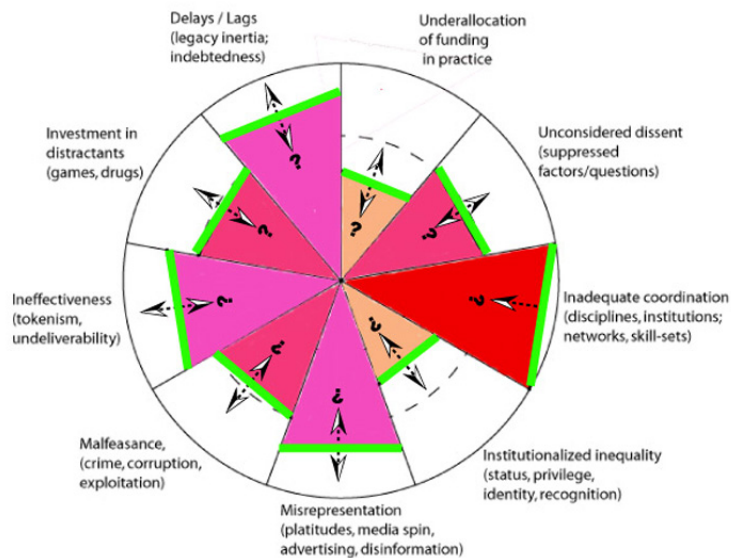
Mapping controversial psychosocial dynamics: "putting God on the map"

The question is how to integrate into a useful systemic map the full spectrum of issues and dynamics which constitutes the problematic context of humanitarian disaster -- however the role of any belief in deity needs to be represented. This specifically requires the "integration" into the map of those perspectives experienced as incompatible and mutually contradictory -- as was the preoccupation of the *Encyclopedia of World Problems and Human Potential*.

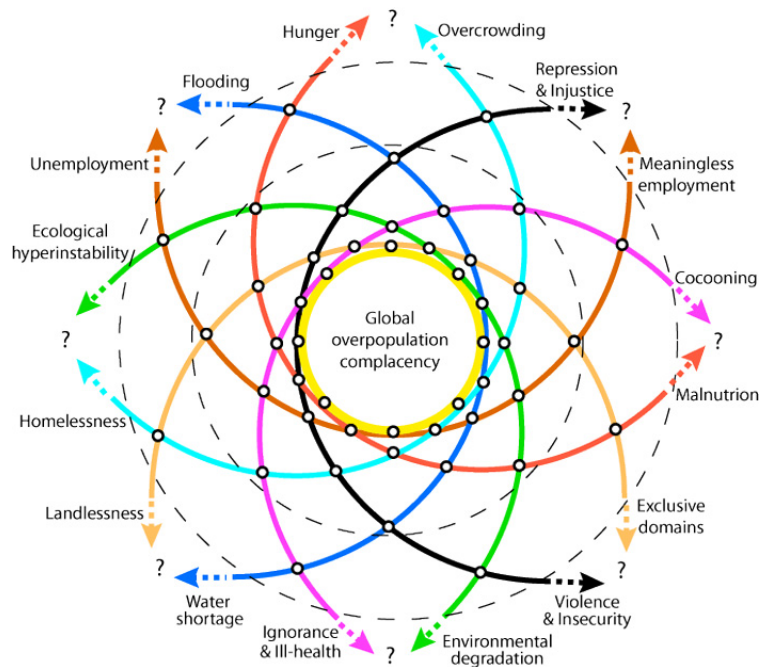
As argued with respect to the failure of the **UN Climate Change Conference** (Copenhagen, 2009), there is a need for better maps to incorporate the diversity of perspectives (*Insights for the Future from the Change of Climate in Copenhagen*, 2010). Given the capacity to produce more complex maps for strategic challenges such as Afghanistan, these can even be adapted as suggestive templates, as separately discussed (*Mapping the climate change context of Copenhagen*, 2010).

However in arguing for "better maps", the argument above suggests the ironic necessity of "putting God on the map" -- since belief in God, the Acts of God, and the recognized representatives of God, play such a central role in relation to the suffering associated with humanitarian disaster. How that role emerges from one or more map "projections" remains to be clarified. The approach could benefit significantly from various approaches to **argument mapping** in order to hold the diverse perspectives -- irrespective of whether incompatibilities can be fruitfully resolved. Early geographical maps of the world have also been characterized by their contradictions and incongruities -- even with respect to "there be dragons"

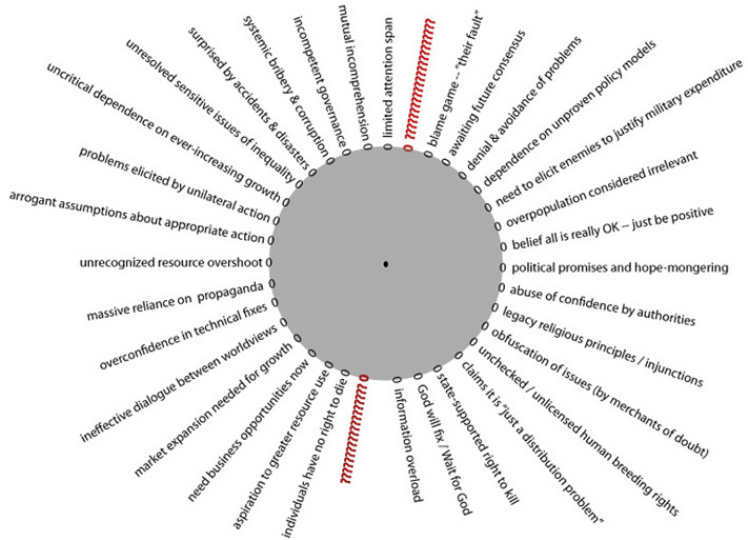
Nine Remedial Capacity Boundaries
 (using the representational pattern of the **Planetary Boundaries** of Johan Rockstrom and Will Steffen, 2009)
 (Reproduced from *Recognizing the Psychosocial Boundaries of Remedial Action: constraints on ensuring a safe operating space for humanity*, 2009)



Global Underground Map
 of *The Unconscious Civilization* (1995) of John Ralston Saul
 (Reproduced from *Mapping the Global Underground*
Articulating Insightful Population Constraint Consideration (IPCC))



Mind Map of Global Civilizational Collapse !
 Indicative configuration of factors undermining fruitful action
 (Reproduced from *Mind Map of Global Civilizational Collapse: Why Nothing is Happening in Response to Global Challenges*, 2011)



The features of the map above are used as the basis for an [extensive range of alternative and more complex projections in three dimensions](#) -- presented in the document from which the above two dimensional projection was reproduced.

Designing denial, unbelief and ignorance into systemic concept maps

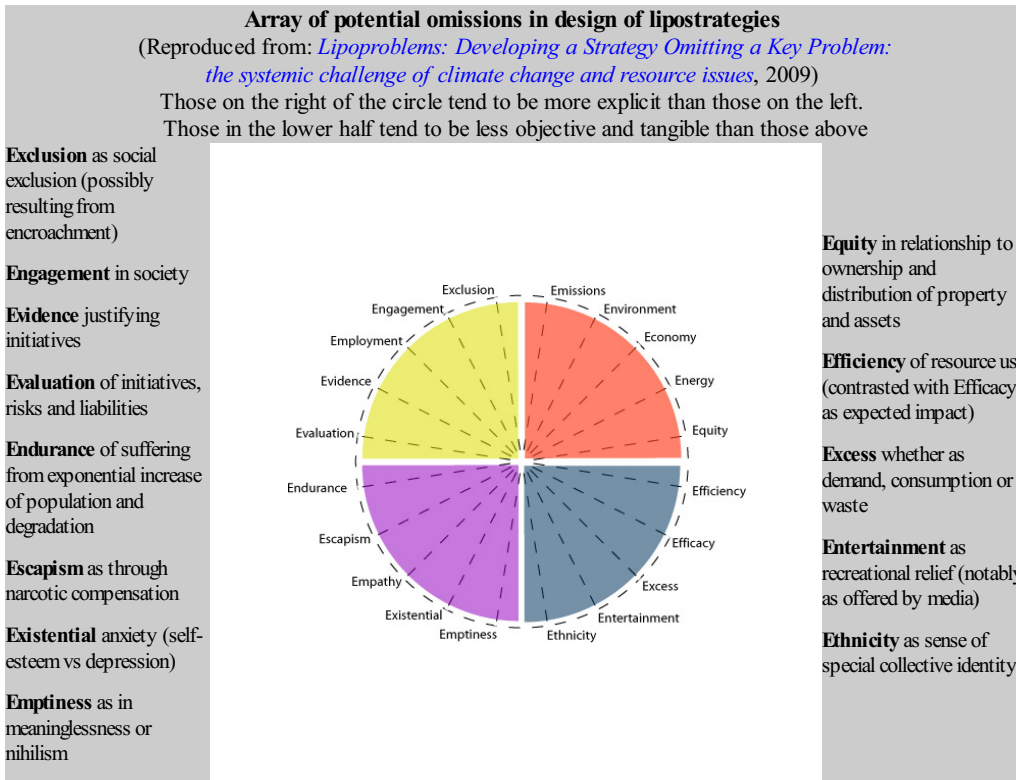
As noted above, various authors have explored the nature of collective, denial, unbelief and ignorance -- together with its strategic implications (Karen A. Cerulo, *Never Saw It Coming: cultural challenges to envisioning the worst*, 2006; Nassim Nicholas Taleb, *The Black Swan: the impact of the highly improbable*, 2007). Official efforts to learn from the intelligence failure of 9/11, as exemplified by those of Josh Kerbel are especially worthy of attention (*From Complicated to Complex: transforming intelligence for a changing world*, 2009; *Lost for Words: the Intelligence Community's struggle to find its voice*, *Parameters (US Army War College Quarterly)*, Summer 2008).

The question is where does the unknown "fit" onto carefully designed systems maps allowing for emergent phenomena -- especially when it is believed to be associated with mystery and "unsaying" of *apophatic discourse* (*Being What You Want: problematic kataphatic identity vs. potential of apophatic identity?* 2008). What is the framework through which to encounter the unexpected (*Engaging with the Inexplicable, the Incomprehensible and the Unexpected*, 2010)?

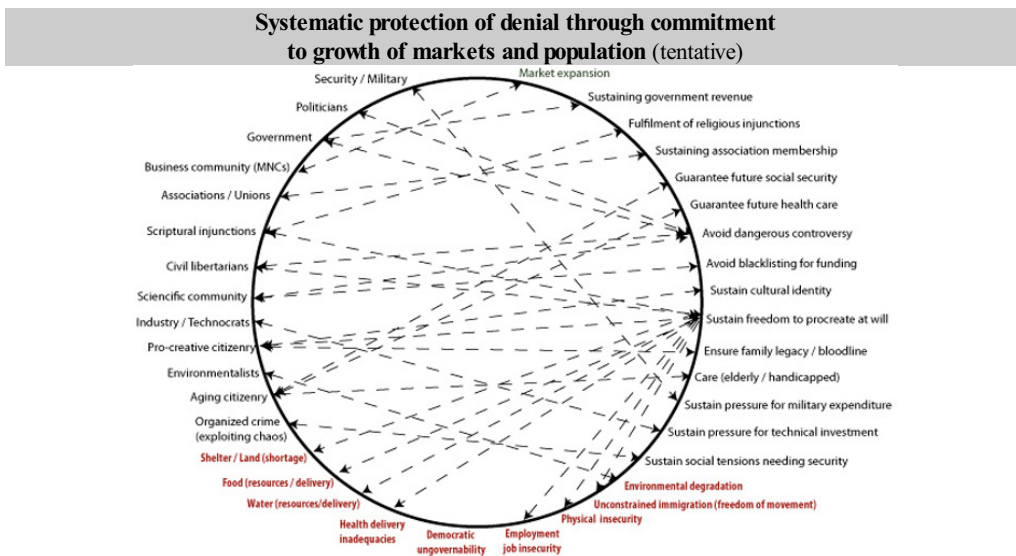
The strategic learnings from the disaster of Iraq were brought into focus through the notorious "poem" regarding the *known unknowns* formulated by the US Secretary of Defense at a press conference in 2002 -- which he subsequently made the theme of his memoir (*Donald Rumsfeld, Known and Unknown: A Memoir*, 2011). That theme is separately discussed using a Chinese cultural framework (*Unknown Undoing: challenge of incomprehensibility of systemic neglect*, 2008).

As mentioned above, any such mapping may also be explored through the design considerations that need to be taken into account in

deliberately endeavouring to ignore central issues. The following schematic endeavoured to capture some of these.



Another approach, applied specifically to the issue of population increase, is as follows. It endeavours to configure together the **actors and constituencies** (left side) variously sustaining the pattern of denial, with the **values to which they are especially sensitive** (right side), in relation to the **issues exacerbated by population increase** (lower portion).



Confidence and consensus: collective strategy in a time of delusion

A focal crisis the time of writing is the future of the economy of Greece, its expected default on loans made, the domino effect on other eurozone countries vulnerable to default, and the possibly disastrous destabilization of the global economy -- with the associated "collateral damage" to lives and livelihoods. As with the preceding financial crisis of 2008-2009, this is appropriately described as a crisis of confidence.

In parallel, much is made of the technical expertise of scientists -- most unfortunately called into question by the climate change debate and the activities of those with vested interests in the status quo (Naomi Oreskes and Erik M. Conway, *Merchants of Doubt: how a handful of scientists obscured the truth on issues from tobacco smoke to global warming*, 2010). Science is notably reluctant, as indicated in the above diagram -- and in discussion of the "psychoactive" nature of any scientific consideration of population increase -- to give appropriate weight to this factor in systemic analysis of resource related strategic issues.

This is exemplified by the manner in which the population factor in the *Kaya Identity* has been dismissed in the IPCC *Fourth Assessment Report* (*Climate Change 2007: Mitigation. Contribution of Working Group III to the Fourth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental*

Panel on Climate Change, 2007) in the following manner:

At the global scale, declining carbon and energy intensities have been unable to offset income effects and population growth and, consequently, carbon emissions have risen....

The challenge - an absolute reduction of global GHG emissions - is daunting. It presupposes a reduction of energy and carbon intensities at a faster rate than income and population growth taken together. Admittedly, there are many possible combinations of the four Kaya identity components, **but with the scope and legitimacy of population control subject to ongoing debate, the remaining two technology-oriented factors, energy and carbon intensities, have to bear the main burden....** [emphasis added]

With the effective failure of UN climate change negotiations, it is striking the manner in which scientific debate has been reduced to a simplistic polarization between the "renewable" and "nuclear" options offered by technology. This is in process of being dubiously reframed by "urgency" to include consideration of "geo-engineering" options with unforeseeable planetary consequences (cf *Geo-engineering Oversight Agency for Thermal Stabilization (GOATS)*, 2008). Current initiatives are helpfully summarized by John Vidal (*Geo-engineering: green versus greed in the race to cool the planet*, *The Observer*, 10 July 2011). As noted by Vidal: Critics fear that manipulating weather patterns could have a calamitous effect on poorer countries. Another case of plausible deniability -- but by technocrats?

Science however avoids all attention to the possibility of constraining the pattern of continuing population increase -- effectively treated as an unquestionable "given" subject only to modification by humanitarian disaster, however induced. Particularly relevant is the scientific incapacity to analyze the possibility of informed debate on the matter and enhance it. God and his accredited representatives are "off the map" of psychosocial systems analysis. Curiously however, science is also seemingly completely incapable of analyzing the blame game in which its disciplines are implicated -- and acknowledging that it has no desire to do so.

In addition, as noted above, scientists of repute sustain a critical debate emphasizing the manner in which religion systematically inhibits effective response to the strategic challenges faced by humanity (Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 2006; Christopher Hitchens, *God Is Not Great: how religion poisons everything*, 2007).

Within this context, it is appropriate to extend the logic of the Dawkins argument beyond "God" -- as an integrative insight worthy of suspicion by science -- and to recognize that the capacity for any integrative insight, including that of science, should also be called into question. How did the assumption emerge that humanity could achieve global consensus appropriate to the challenges it faces -- with the quality of thinking characteristic of discussions of such consensus? Is humanity bedevilled by a delusion of larger scope (*The Consensus Delusion: Mysterious attractor undermining global civilization as currently imagined*, 2011)? Does such recognition provide a key to an understanding of global "ungovernability" -- through the frameworks by which governance is currently envisaged (*Ungovernability of Sustainable Global Democracy? Towards engaging appropriately with time*, 2011)?

In effect both religion and science are offering a kind of tangible, objective surrogate for the intangible, subjective qualities of "confidence". The question is whether a richer understanding of "confidence" is called for -- as tentatively implied by the features of the following schematic, and in a related commentary (*Primary Global Reserve Currency: the Con? Cognitive implications of a prefix for sustainable confidence*, 2011).

Of particular interest is the possibility of framing the "unknown" -- so readily denied -- which is variously both attractive and threatening (*Human Values as Strange Attractors: coevolution of classes of governance principles*, 1993; *Thinking in Terror: refocusing the interreligious challenge from "Thinking after Terror"*, 2005)

Confidence and its Surrogates

indicative configuration of the variety of expressions and tokens of confidence
(Reproduced from *Varieties of Confidence Essential to Sustainability: surrogates and tokens obscuring the existential "gold standard"*, 2009)



Curiously the challenge may be partially understood as one of coherent representation and the representation of coherence -- at a time of information overload and a need for communicable mnemonics. Hence the case for richer maps exploiting all the multi-media facilities now on offer to enable a variety of "projections" understood both in their geometrical and psychological senses. Possibilities are indicated in the above-mentioned document (*Mind Map of Global Civilizational Collapse; Why Nothing is Happening in Response to Global Challenges*, 2011). The case for imaging adequate to the imaginative challenge of global governance may be variously expressed (*Imagining the Real Challenge and Realizing the Imaginal Pathway of Sustainable Transformation*, 2007; *In Quest of Mnemonic Catalysts for comprehension of complex psychosocial dynamics*, 2007).

If the challenge of global governance is to be framed in terms of enhancing coherence, its representation, its comprehension and its communicability, the question is imbuing this coherence with a dynamic -- rather than implying that it is essentially of a static nature. The argument would then be that a viable, living coherence is necessarily essentially emergent for it to be sustainable.

Especially helpful in this respect is the work of [Christopher Alexander](#), most notably his articulation of *A Pattern Language*, with Ishikawa and Silverstein (1977) as a *Timeless Way of Building* (1979). In the latter he describes this process in terms of a "quality without a name":

- *There is a central quality which is the root criterion of life and spirit in a man, a town, a building, or a wilderness. This quality is objective and precise, but it cannot be named,*
- *The search, which we make for this quality, in our own lives, is the central search of any person, and the crux of any individual person's story. It is the search for those moments and situations when we are most alive.*
- *In order to define this quality in buildings and in towns, we must begin by understanding that every place is given its character by certain patterns of events that keep on happening there.*
- *These patterns of events are always interlocked with certain geometric patterns in the space. Indeed, as we shall see, each building and each town is ultimately made out of these patterns in the space, and out of nothing else: they are the atoms and the mole cules from which a building or a town is made.*
- *The specific patterns out of which a building or a town is made may be alive or dead. To the extent they are alive, they let our inner forces loose, and set us free; but when they are dead, they keep us locked in inner conflict.*
- *The more living patterns there are in a place -- a room, a building, or a town -- the more it comes to life as an entirety, the more it glows, the more it has that self-maintaining fire which is the quality without a name.*
- *And when a building has this fire, then it becomes a part of nature. Like ocean waves, or blades of grass, its parts are governed by the endless play of repetition and variety created in the presence of the fact that all things pass. This is the quality itself.*

This design insight into patterns can be used as a form of template to explore the possibility of a *5-fold Pattern Language* (1984) encompassing

- **Socio-organizational environment:** Patterns relevant to the organization of social groups, organizations and networks.
- **Conceptual environment:** Patterns relevant to the organization of a conceptual framework or a body of knowledge.
- **Intra-personal environment:** Patterns relevant to the organization of modes of awareness adopted by a person.

Alexander has extended his exploration through a 4-volume study of the *The Nature of Order* (2002- 2005). This has led him into a focus on "geometrical adaptation" (*New Concepts in Complexity Theory*, 2003) and what he describes as *Harmony-Seeking Computations: a science of non-classical dynamics based on the progressive evolution of the larger whole* (2009). This is the subject of a separate commentary of relevance to the above argument (*Harmony-Comprehension and Wholeness-Engendering: eliciting psychosocial transformational principles from design*, 2010).

Does the above-mentioned recognition of the "planetary boundaries" to provide a "safe operating space for humanity" (Rockstrom and Steffen, 2009) -- require the integration of such psychosocial dimensions in order to enable the design, in Alexander's sense, of a "good place to be" in the light of its essentially "nameless" quality?

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